

ABC NIGHTLINE TEXT
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KOPPEL: Most Americans have never heard of it. Even fewer. Suriname, a northern neighbor of Brazil wedged between Guyana and French Guiana, has been attracting a fair amount of international attention as a colonial backwater until 1975. Its government is flirting with Nicaragua and just a couple of months ago signed a free trade agreement with that country. It is only a tiny country with a population of fewer than 400,000, a little larger than Georgia, but in the current political climate, a friend of Fidel Castro is viewed as part of a larger trend. South America and the Caribbean, in that kind of climate, as Carl Bernstein found out in this exclusive report, the Reagan administration was ready to turn concern into action.

BERNSTEIN: President Reagan last year authorized the Central Intelligence Agency to undertake covert actions aimed at overthrowing the government of the tiny South American state of Suriname. The rationale of the president and the CIA to justify such actions? That Suriname's military leader, a former physical education instructor named [REDACTED] Bouterse, was leading his country toward the arms of Fidel Castro. That was last winter in December. As required by law, Central Intelligence Agency Director William Casey went to Capitol Hill to inform the House and Senate Intelligence Committees of the impending operation, a multi-million dollar plan to create a paramilitary force of exiles from Suriname to overpower the country's army and topple Bouterse, but according to congressional sources, the administration's plan caused a full-scale revolt of both committees by Democrats and Republicans alike. The threat to hemispheric security, cited by the President and the CIA, simply did not exist, the congressmen argued. Evidence that Castro was manipulating the government in Suriname or gaining a military foothold in the country was virtually nonexistent, they told Casey. Bouterse had praised Castro, allowed the Cubans a well-staffed embassy in Suriname's capital but little more. Wrong, says Surinamese political commentator Fred Marte, now an exiled leader of the Council to Liberate Suriname. FRED MARTE: The Cubans have been visiting Suriname after Bouterse took over. They're advising Bouterse. They're advising the minister of culture and mobilization how to teach the Suriname people how to make a revolution. They are advising, giving military advice to Bouterse.

BERNSTEIN: American intelligence officials say they lack such specific information. They were and are concerned about what might happen. FRED IKLE (Under Secretary of Defense): We are deeply concerned that this would be an extension of the Cuban-style totalitarian regimes that is emerging in Suriname, that we can't be sure yet.

BERNSTEIN: Within a week of the CIA director's appearance before the House Intelligence Committee, Chairman Edward Boland had written the president that members were virtually unanimous in opposition to the CIA's plans. The Senate committee also informed the president of its vehement and united opposition. The administration had become totally paranoid about Castro, members told Casey, seeking confrontation with the Cubans at almost every turn in the Americas. Things had gone too far. After listening to the objections of the House committee, Casey said the CIA would nevertheless go ahead with its plans. The law requires only that congressional intelligence committees be informed of covert actions. The committees have no power to veto such operations, but when Casey ran into a solid wall of opposition on a Senate committee as well, he and the White House reportedly began reconsidering. Several weeks later the congressional committees were informed by Casey that the plans for overthrowing the government in Suriname had been withdrawn, and members seem

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